

PRESS RELEASE

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION

Divisions of Boating and Waterways, Historic Preservation and Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation

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Division of Boating and Waterways Launches National Safe Boating Week (May 18 – 24)

Wearing Life Jackets is the Best Way to Survive an Emergency

SACRAMENTO, Calif. – With the official kickoff of the boating season approaching this coming Memorial Day weekend, the Division of Boating and Waterways (DBW) is reminding water enthusiasts to keep themselves and their loved ones safe during National Safe Boating Week and throughout the year. DBW advises boaters to always check the water conditions—whether it's the California coast or inland rivers and lakes—and their safety equipment, and always wear a life jacket.

Wearing a life jacket is the No. 1 way to increase the chances of survival in an emergency, whether on a powerboat or paddlecraft. California boating accident statistics show that three out of four recreational boating fatalities could have been prevented had they been wearing a life jacket.

“Emergency situations can happen too fast to reach for a life jacket,” says DBW Acting Deputy Director Ramona Fernandez. “Always wearing your life jacket while boating is the easiest preventative action boaters can take when out on the water. Even adults who are good swimmers can drown, especially this time of the year when the water temperatures are still cold.”

Modern life jackets come in cool and comfortable styles and designs. There are many options for life jackets, but it is important to choose the right one for the intended boating activity.

Below are some tips to keep in mind when selecting a life jacket:

- **Coast Guard–Approved:** Only approved life jackets should be used while boating. All life jackets approved by the Coast Guard will have an approval number located on the inside label.
- **Proper Fit:** Life jackets are sized by weight and chest measurements. An adult-sized life jacket is not suitable for a child, as the life jacket may be too large and may ride up around their face or even slip off. Always check the fit of the child's life jacket before

entering the water. A life jacket too small for the wearer may not provide enough flotation to keep a person afloat.

- **Intended Boating Activity:** Make sure that the life jacket is approved for the specific boating activity.
- **Good Condition:** Check the life jacket before use to ensure it is in good condition. Life jackets can lose their buoyancy. Replace a life jacket that has faded labels, rips, tears, mildew, loose or missing straps, frayed webbing, broken zippers or buckles, or hardened stuffing. If an inflatable life jacket is used, check recommendations from the manufacturer on the CO₂ canister and arming mechanism, and replace as necessary.
- **Children and Life Jackets:** Under California law, every child under 13 years of age on a moving recreational vessel of any length must wear a Coast Guard–approved life jacket in serviceable condition and of a type and size appropriate for the conditions and the activity. Many cities and counties also have regulations about children and youth life jacket requirements along rivers and lakes. Always check with local managers about life jacket rules.

DBW partners with water safety officials throughout the state to offer programs to help ensure boaters have access to life jackets. Don't have the right life jacket? Check the two programs below to see where life jackets are available free to the public:

- **2019 Life Jacket Trade-in Events:** During National Safe Boating Week, outdoor enthusiasts may trade in an old, outgrown or unserviceable life jacket for a new, Coast Guard–approved life jacket at a life jacket trade-in event. Similar events may be added throughout the summer. [View life jacket trade-in events here.](#)
- **Life Jacket Loaner Stations:** Boaters may also borrow a life jacket for a day or weekend from more than 100 life jacket loaner stations throughout the state. [View life jacket loaner stations.](#)

For more boating and water safety information or laws, please visit BoatCalifornia.com.

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Division of Boating and Waterways

Enhances public access to California's waterways and promotes on-the-water safety to California's more than four million motorized and non-motorized boaters through programs funded by vessel registration fees, boating fuel tax dollars and boating facility construction loan payments. Learn more at www.dbw.parks.ca.gov.

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